

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000686

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL, S/CT; USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: DEEP SOUTH UPDATE - JANUARY 26, 2005

REF: BANGKOK 485

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Clarke. Reason: 1.4 (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Violence continues in the far southern provinces of Thailand, in stark contrast to images of ongoing relief efforts in neighboring provinces. With the tsunami garnering less attention the media, violence in the deep South is again re-emerging as a central domestic political issue. In what appears to be an ill-advised move to augment a policy that is overly security-based, the RTG is considering deployment of a new infantry division to the South. Current plans would greatly increase the number of troops in the region and provide for a separate chain of command, outside the existing 4th Army structure. The Muslim population in southern Thailand is likely to react poorly to more troops among them. The government promise that more Islamic teachers will be arrested also could potentially backfire. Recent hints by the Police that some politicians are behind the southern violence probably should be discounted in light of the upcoming February 6 elections.
END SUMMARY

DAILY INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE CONTINUE

2. (U) As noted in reftel, violent attacks in the far south of Thailand have not diminished since the December 26, 2004 tsunami. The violence continues in the pattern witnessed

SIPDIS

during most of 2004, with shootings, bombings, and arson attacks occurring on an almost daily basis. On January 24 a policeman in Narathiwat and a mail carrier in Yala were shot and killed by unknown assailants.

GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING NEW FORCE FOR SOUTH

3. (SBU) The RTG is seriously considering creation of a new "15th infantry division" to strengthen the combat capability of security forces in the three southernmost provinces. The division, if approved, reportedly would have 12,000 troops. The unit would be led by an Army Major General who would report directly to Army central command in Bangkok (and not through the 4th Army Area Commander who is supposed to lead Army units in the South). Prime Minister Thaksin said on January 25, after expectations had been raised of Cabinet approval that day, that the issue was still under consideration.

GOVERNMENT SAYS MORE ISLAMIC TEACHERS WILL BE ARRESTED

4. (U) Justice Minister Pongthep Thepkanjana announced on January 25 that the RTG has issued warrants for 21 Islamic religious teachers, or "ustaz". Eight ustaz have already been arrested in the past month, and the government has claimed that they are providing credible information to investigators.

5. (U) Separately, Sombat Amornvivat, the Director-General of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), claimed on January 24 that the DSI had evidence linking certain (unnamed) "politicians" to ongoing southern violence. Sombat said the evidence was not yet substantial enough to issue warrants, but that the investigation would continue. He also noted that the arrests of politicians now could adversely affect the election, scheduled for February 6.

COMMENT

6. (C) COMMENT: The unabated violence in southern Thailand has not won the militants any sympathy from a country still reeling from the tsunami. The Thai press has correctly heaped scorn on "heartless" militants who continue attacks while fellow Muslims in neighboring provinces are still suffering from the disaster. But the RTG's consideration of a new Army division is not a hopeful sign for the region. While the security situation continues to deteriorate in the south it is not clear how adding more troops (and another cumbersome, confusing layer) to the already disjointed southern security structure will lessen the violence. If anything the presence of more security forces in the South will likely exacerbate already high levels of local resentment against the Thai military and Police, which has only increased following the events at Tak Bai in October,

12004.

17. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The focus on Islamic teachers may be yielding information, but it is an approach that resonates badly with the local Muslim population in the deep South. The announcement that "politicians" are behind some of the violence in the South is probably an allusion to long-standing rumors in the south that members of the "Vaddah" (Unity) faction of Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party are using the violence for their own political ends. These rumors have never been substantiated and this public announcement needs to be considered in the context of the upcoming general election on February 6. END COMMENT
BOYCE